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HELL AND PARADISE

AN AMERICAN ODYSSEY

Anton Volney

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Chapter 2: Frenemy

“I think it’s okay for a man to eat a woman’s ass...” Erika said as she slurped her black coffee.

“But I’ll be DAMNED if I EVER eat a man’s ass.”

This was how my day started with Erika every day.

We drank coffee strong enough to kill a horse and talked about the most ridiculous bullshit.

Every single day for eight years.

This was our ritual. It went with the territory. Two creative geniuses attached at the hip all day—every day.

We were codependent as fuck. Dangerously codependent. We had a three-bedroom apartment from which we lived and worked.

It was a universe unto itself. We rarely had visitors.

We kept to ourselves. Two writers up in that house all day. With anywhere between four and eight cats. More if you counted their stray lovers. With nothing but our crazy thoughts — it always made for great discussion.

She was a Tumblr feminist.

This is a VERY niche type of personality. VERY.

People on Tumblr were thoroughly indoctrinated in a worldview that ran counter to mainstream Western values.

Tumblr Circa 2018 was the original woke mob. Everyone was a communist or an anarchist. Everyone used pronouns — long before pronouns were a thing. All the girlyies were leaking the tea about racism, intersectional feminism, and all things LGBTQ.

Tumblr's user base was younger than most other social media sites. About half the users are under 25 years old. It was where all the kids absconded because their parents were now on Facebook, which meant that Facebook was no longer cool.

It was full of high school drama, silly in-jokes, and kids trying to figure out who they were and what they believed—sometimes by getting into absurd arguments with strangers.

There was always something hilarious going viral on Tumblr.

It always made for great conversation in the morning.

Most people on Tumblr write for a small audience of their friends, not for public consumption by their grandmothers and coworkers, as you write on Facebook.

Most people use Tumblr with a pseudonym and don't connect it to their "real name." Because of the anonymity on Tumblr, there were some real psychos on the platform.

This was a place where sex workers would do long, deep dives into their entire lives and how they got into the business. How much money do they make per night?

What positions do they like? What they think about the Johns they fuck. You would be surprised at how much thought goes into being a prostitute. Many sex workers had husbands and children.

Some parts of their lives looked very ordinary on the surface.

People would be incredibly open with each other on the platform.

This was the place to let your freak flag fly.

There were all sorts of strange parasocial relationships, lasting for years between people who had never met in real life. It was such a wacky place.

Where all the nerds went to be nerdy together.

Naturally, the discourse of that day on Tumblr was ass-eating, and Erika was weighing in with all of her Tumblr friends.

The whole of Tumblr was split down the middle on ass-eating. Some for, some against. There was even a microbiologist who weighed in.

She was definitely against it. Scientifically speaking... there was no way to explain away the millions of microbes you can see under the microscope with your own two eyes.

But some people on Tumblr defended ass-eating vociferously.

All things were possible when you were utterly anonymous on the internet. Erika used Tumblr to rant about whatever made her miserable that day and share her thoughts about whatever book she read.

And let me tell you... This girl read books like nobody I've ever seen. Just being around her changed me.

She expanded me intellectually.

This was the first of many ways I grew and developed because I was around her.

Erika would read five or six books on the Rwandan Genocide, and then she'd know everything there was to know about that one topic. And she would give me all the details — beat by beat, so I'd understand by the end of our cup of coffee.

Books like How Fascism Works

Bell Hooks books.

Black History books.

Deep Dives into The Parkland School Shooter, the Manson

Family, and Gucci Maine...

Simone Beauvoir's The Second Sex...

She was always reading something. And she could pound back a book in a week with no problem. Sometimes, two or three.

In that way, she was a freak. Perhaps too smart for her own good.

She was so knowledgeable and confident that few people would dare argue with Erika because she would destroy them.

One time, she told me about a white guy in her friend group at Middlebury who admitted that he thought black people were dumber than white people, which was why affirmative action was ruining the school.

And she said, “Oh, yeah?”

“Then why are my grades better than yours?”

Mic drop.

But I digress — back to Tumblr.

This place was a breeding ground for the strangest people — Erika followed this random girl from Vegas who always had a ridiculous gift. At one point, I think she had a side hustle as a cam girl.

An OnlyFans type of girl before OnlyFans was a thing.

At another point, she would buy underwear in bulk, wear them for a day, and then sell them all dirtied to perverts on the internet for a hundred bucks. This girl was, to this day, the most enterprising and freewheeling woman I've ever met.

Her latest gift was as a romance author. She was 20, and here she was on Tumblr, bragging about clearing \$20,000 in a month — from writing smut. Ah, the good old days of romance.

In our relationship, Erika told me about this strange girl...

And I know a good business opportunity when I see one. So, I pushed hard for Erika to consider becoming a romance author. She loved to write. She wrote smut here and there for fun herself. I told her this was it. And, incredibly, she listened.

She decided to change her life thoroughly and planned to pursue this bizarre path. Most people couldn't pull it off, but she did.

We both worked from home... and were entrepreneurs... which enabled us to live our ridiculous lives in St. Lucia.

She did have some help. I'd been a freelance copywriter for several years at this point... so I helped her through her learning curve. And I always gave her the support she needed when struggling and stuck.

I think I helped her shave a few years off her journey to becoming a successful author. She'd probably say it was all her because she never gave me much credit for anything...

Whatever. I said what I said.

Those years with her. They were some of the most important of my life. I am a completely different person today than I was back then. I was figuring out how to keep the bills paid. And get out of the rat race.

And deal with surprise business nightmares while I felt depressed and hopeless. At the same time, I was almost 250 pounds.

And, while I went into hiding from my family for over 5 years...

This crucible shaped me into the more healed and authentic version I am today. David Goggins is one of my favorite authors.

He's inspirational because he had a radical transformation different from the end of his story from where he started.

He went from being an obese, semi-illiterate roach exterminator... to a Navy Seal, ultra marathon champion, and broke the world record for most pull-ups in a day. (That's right, he did pull-ups for 24 hours straight.) I once heard him say, "I went through hell... until I became the devil."

That's what happened to me. But I didn't know it was happening while going through this process.

On the contrary, some days, just getting out of bed was a struggle. It was like I was like a soup dinner on the stove. If you checked the taste before it was ready, you might not like it...

But once I was done... I became a masterpiece.

I had no idea how powerful the lessons I was learning would be. Life was testing me, and these were the battles I had to win before I could become Mike Tyson.

Erika was a romance author. It's a ridiculous profession — I might add. It was not at all uncommon for Erika to be in the middle of an anal sex scene, as she would tell me all about it... how the plot was progressing.

If she'd written up something she was extra excited about, she would always be eager to tell me all about it—sometimes reciting her story line by line.

By the time our relationship ended, she had written over 60 complete novels. I'm sure that number is past 100 by now.

And some of the titles were ridiculous...

✓ Anaconda

✓ The Cocky Cowboy

✓ Mafia Playmate

✓ Purchased for Seduction

✓ Quarantined By The Celebrity Who Bought Me

✓ 9-Inch Addiction

✓ Rock Hard Alpha Male

✓ The Cockiest Cowboy to Have Ever Cocked.

Among many others...

Two little urchins in a complex and twisted folie a deux.

Until next time,

Anton Volney



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